

What does the new World Report on Hearing tell us?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched its much-anticipated World Report on Hearing. This landmark publication is set to change the future for over 2.5 billion people around the world who will be living with hearing loss by 2050.

Here we break down the Report into bite-sized pieces. You can also [read the full report](#) on the WHO hearing health webpage.

Why now?

The prevalence of hearing loss around the world continues to rise, and with it the global economic impact and mounting personal burden. WHO estimate that unaddressed hearing loss results in a global annual loss of almost 1 trillion International dollars.

The World Report on Hearing follows on from WHO Resolution (WHA70.13), which urges Member States to prioritise access to hearing care within national health plans and as part of universal health coverage. The Report guides nations to take definitive action by providing a clear direction, identifying best practices, and offers core recommendations for cost-effective interventions.

The call to action is clear:

Make ear and hearing care accessible to all

What are the key messages?

1. "The number of people living with unaddressed hearing loss and ear diseases is unacceptable.
2. Timely action can prevent and address hearing loss across the life course.
3. Investing in cost effective interventions will benefit people with hearing loss and bring financial gains to the society.
4. Countries must act to integrate people-centred ear and hearing care within national health plans for universal health coverage." [[World Report on Hearing Executive Summary](#)]

In brief, what does the report tell us?

The Report explores the multi-faceted dynamics of hearing and ear care including prevention, access to treatment and medical professionals, education, social awareness, and limitations across health systems.

The negative impact that unaddressed hearing loss has on communication, speech and language development, education, quality of life, employment, relationships, and cognition, are well

documented and further reaffirmed by WHO in their people-centred approach.

You may also be interested in:

Blog: [Hearing loss is the number one modifiable risk factor of dementia](#)

60% of hearing loss in children can be prevented through measures including improved maternal care and immunization. The introduction of hearing screening for both children and adults is a key priority for the early identification of ear diseases and hearing loss.

For the 700 million people requiring hearing intervention and rehabilitation, access to medical support, surgery, assistive devices, or high-quality hearing technology play an important role. Access to technology remains a challenge, with only 10-23% of people globally using a hearing aid, despite potentially benefitting from one. The figure for cochlear implants is believed to be even lower.

To address this, the Report acknowledges that hearing technologies, such as cochlear implants, hearing aids, or bone conduction devices, are effective and cost-effective. Suggestions that such devices should be incorporated into person-centred approaches and supported by rehabilitation are welcome additions.

Low access to hearing health professionals across the globe remains a challenge, particularly in low-income countries where approximately "93% have fewer than one audiologist per million" citizens [page 164].

Share:

WHO has published a series of [infographics and social media tiles](#) providing the latest facts about hearing loss globally and by region

What is a H.E.A.R.I.N.G strategy?

A core element of the Report is the implementation of H.E.A.R.I.N.G. intervention principles for ear and hearing care within national public health plans, as well as action and support at grassroots levels and for personal care. It calls for a new way forward based on:

- **H**earing screening and intervention – providing systematic screening across the life course for early identification of hearing loss
- **E**ar disease prevention and management – facilitating a trained workforce to deliver good practices, treatment and surgery interventions
- **A**ccess to technologies – including hearing aids, cochlear implants and assistive devices
- **R**ehabilitation services – that are multi-disciplined and age-appropriate
- **I**mproved communication – with access to signed and captioned services
- **N**oise reduction – through safe personal and occupational listening practices
- **G**reater community engagement – as multi-sectoral organisations work together to raise awareness and address stigma.

WHO believe that the integration of cost-effective 'H.E.A.R.' interventions by policy makers can result in returns of "nearly US\$ 16 for every 1 dollar invested" [page 202] and 130 million disability

adjusted life years (DALY) saved. This marks a significant alleviation of burden for individuals and society at large.

What actions do WHO propose?

The World Report on Hearing calls for Governments to use an Integrated, People Centred Ear and Hearing Care (IPC-EHC) methodology that incorporates the H.E.A.R.I.N.G framework. Put simply, WHO asks policy makers to:

- “Develop evidence-based policies
- Provide workforce education & training
- Promote task sharing across workforce & telehealth services
- Include hearing technologies as essential assistive products
- Monitor ear and hearing care (EHC) indicators through national health
- Information systems
- Prioritize impact-oriented research” [[World Report on Hearing Executive Summary](#)]

Thirteen recommendations support this, with specific recommendations for representatives from Ministries of Health, International and Nongovernmental Organizations, as well as stakeholders including professional groups from ear and hearing care sector, civil society and industry. Read the recommendations specific to your role on pages 245-250 of the Report.

How will success be measured?

Three indicators and supporting targets [pages 223-224] have been identified as ambitious but realistic targets for success worldwide:

- 20% increase in the coverage of newborn hearing screening services
- 20% increase in the number of adults with hearing loss that use hearing technology such as hearing aids and implants
- 20% reduction in chronic ear diseases and unaddressed hearing loss in children aged 5–9 years.

What now?

Do you work or volunteer in ear and hearing care including international and nongovernmental organizations, professional groups, or civil society?

Then like us, you can take action to increase access to hearing and ear care.

If you're interested in partnering with [Hearing Health Forum EU](#) on future initiatives to help bring the report to life across Europe, please reach out to us via LinkedIn or email contact@hearinghealth.eu

References:

- Policy brief. Integrated people-centred ear and hearing care. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
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- World report on hearing – Executive summary. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO